

Peking's Drive to Curb Use Of Money Stuns East Europe

By Flora Lewis
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The writer of the following article, Flora Lewis, is an American journalist of long experience in the Communist countries of Eastern Europe and the author of "A Case History of Hope," the story of Poland's 1956 "October Revolution."

BONN—The transformation of Communist China's country side into a number of vast, fully regimented communes has stunned Communists throughout Eastern Europe. As details of the commune system begin to filter out of China, even the most orthodox Marxists—those who had been rigidly opposed to relaxations in their own countries—appear to be terrified at the implication of the Chinese experiment. Quite possibly, there are those in the Soviet hierarchy who feel the same way, but they have not seen fit to weep on Western shoulders as yet.

What concerns these Communist leaders most is not the extent of the regimentation of the Chinese peasants and workers, the militarization, the destruction of the family unit. It is the gradual suppression of the use of money.

Get Only Pocket Money

In the most advanced communes, the people receive only a small amount of pocket money. As private plots of land are bought up, payment is partly in coupons, which can

be used for the communal without money, meant to provide restaurants, barber shops, clothing stores, and so forth, and its attendant evils, is in

In some communes, Marxist theory the final, most still being paid, but the amount. But for more than 20 years is small, and the goal is now the Soviet Union has to be gradually drawn away from that goal. Although it was expressed in the in-practical troubles with production, the essential reason for projects of national was that money is the easiest way of expressing choice, and the diversified quirks of human personality demand some choice.

Whether the plan will work is another matter. The Soviet Union, after far less drastic experiments than China has announced, found it necessary to fall back on money incentives.

Difficult to Grasp

But the plan, if it were successfully completed, would mean such a profound change in the whole modern concept of life that it is difficult for Western minds to grasp. We find it difficult to imagine a society without a medium of exchange for the individual.

What it would mean, in terms of ordinary life, is the almost total suppression of choice—not just choice of a political party in elections, nor choice of jobs, nor choice of where to live, but virtually all choice, from the trivial to the most urgent.

Soviet citizens, who live by a money economy, are not a Western supply and demand one. They choose that. Peking might succeed in whether to spurge a bottle of vodka or save it for a new pair of shoes.

The utopian goal of a society

Incident Reported

An incident reported by some Eastern European Communists who were in Peking early this year illustrates why China's new experiment disturbs them so much. They were speaking with Mao Tse-tung about the difficulties of raising the standard of living in their own country.

Mao brushed aside the whole subject with disdain, and told them, "Why do you worry about the standard of living? It can only go down. In a few thousand years, there will be two billion in China and your country will have at least 10 times its present population. You'll have to have passes rationing the right to go out on the street for a breath of air. Forget the standard of living. Teach the people music."

The European Communists aren't afraid China will fall although in reaching the "pure" Marxist goal. What worries them is Peking might succeed in so many so-called capitalist evils that even a loyal Communist's life would lose all savor.